

# Zanmi Detroit

February 2011  
Volume 6, No. 1  
Haitian Network Group of Detroit

## From the President

2013 promises to be exciting and rewarding. We started the New Year with two new Board members, Dr. Jean-Claude Dutes and Shirley Alce-Konate. Both of these individuals bring a wealth of experience, enthusiasm and an unquestionable dedication to our community. In June, Shirley will coordinate the mother's day celebration where HNGD will honor the matriarch of our community and in the following month Dr. Dutes will host a panel discussion on mental health. In July, we will feature a movie on the life of Toussaint Louverture, one of the leaders of the Haitian revolution. In August, we will celebrate our heritage with a panel discussion on Vodou and in December, we will have our holiday party.

None of those events or activities is achievable without your support. We led a successful membership drive in the first quarter of the year. We are hoping more of you will join us.

Last year at a joint event with the N'namdi Gallery, we awarded our yearly scholarship grant to Phara Paul a nursing student attending the Haiti Nursing school in Leogane. In partnership with ESPOIR, I had the privilege of introducing Michel Sorel and Mark Mathelier to the Detroit community. This is the second time as President of this organization; I had the opportunity to bring very talented Haitian classical musicians to grace our stage. They left our audience with a great sense of pride in our culture.

On behalf of the Haitian Network Group of Detroit I cannot thank you enough for all the help and support you continue to provide us throughout the years. I am extremely excited and looking forward to work with you.

Rosario Danier,  
Haitian Network Group of Detroit, President



## Mark Your Calendar

### Film Screening on Toussaint Louverture

Date: TBD  
Time: 7:00 PM  
Location: TBD

### Panel Discussion on Mental Health

Date: TBD  
Time: TBD  
Location: TBD

### Mothers' day celebration

Date: TBD  
Time: 9PM  
Location: TBD

### Presentation on Vodou

Date: TBD  
Time: 9PM  
Location: TBD

### Holiday gathering

Date: TBD  
Time: 8:00 PM  
Location: TBD



Michele Sorel & Marc Mathelier



HNGD Holiday Party

## The way I remember Haiti

By Rosario Danier

2010 left behind a country in ruin and with a questionable future. When I was growing up in Haiti in the early 80s, I distinctly remember my elders talking about Haiti as a country in decadence: political instability, an education system that failed to address the needs of the country, lack of civility among citizens, and the constant mistrust of political leaders. At the age of ten years old, all my classmates and friends were familiar with the saying "stealing from the government is not stealing". We grew up thinking that getting rich at the expense of the people was just a way of life. We had come to accept it as a fact without question and without imposing judgment on those who stole: it was their turn and we were happy for them. We looked up to them like an impressionable kid would idolize the neighborhood drug dealer with his fancy cars and expensive jewelries. We all dreamed of being a public servant, not out of deep sense of civic duty but as the only means to richness.

Unemployment was high. Most people were out of work. Those who were fortunate enough to hold a job did so because of their connection. The concept of having the connection was prevalent in Haitian society. You had to have the right connection to be admitted at the best high school, the right connection to attend the only publicly run medical school and the right connection to land that government job. Each year, the state medical school accepts 200 students out of 3000 applicants. It was not a system based on meritocracy. Years after my brother had graduated from Medical school in Haiti, I found out during a casual conversation with my father that my brother became a physician with the help of a dear friend who had put a good word for him to the medical school director.

The idea that any subject can be argued and contested was seen as an act of defiance. We were taught at home and in school never to question authority in which ever form it comes: whether it is an elder, a school teacher, a friend of the family or a government official. We were forced to accept the very things that were detrimental to us and against our self-interest. I was very fortunate to have lived among some very progressive friends, who have taught me life lessons that I cherish to this day. They dare me to analyze and critique without disrespect, a way to maneuver around the archaic rules of the day.

By the time I reached High school, I became again familiar with a different saying: "Life is so bad in Haiti that it cannot get any worst" the sanitation system was deplorable. Government was incapable of providing the most basic of services, including potable water, electricity and security. After more than thirty years in

power, the Duvalier regime was about to lose control. Years of passivity, lack of hope, abuse of public trust and acts of brutality by government secret service were beginning to give way to a new kind of passive aggression. People began to confront the establishment and complain in public. An act of defiance and complete desperation that implied death wherever and however it came would be a relief. I cannot say I was that deprived but I sympathized with the opposition. My life as a young man at the time was not as bad. I was very active in sports. I was a very talented basketball player. I remembered how I felt every time I stepped on the basketball court. On that court I earned the respect that no authority could strip me of. I would be the first one to get picked in a basketball team. I was always the main point guard and when I had the ball, the defending team was on put on notice: people would line up to watch me play. It is funny how an entire section of one life can be summarized by one instance that stays with you forever. Out of my entire adolescent basketball career I vividly remember leading a fast break. It was me against the defender and I can hear even now the crowd cheering: "break him, break him Rio, show him what you can do". I fainted my opponent to his left where he was most vulnerable, put him out of balance and dribbled the ball to his right and completed the layup with a left hand basket. The crowd stood on its feet, cheered and applauded with so much excitement that thought I had landed on the moon. For a brief moment I was the star, I was respected. I was revered. Despite my small frame, I was always accepted by my peers that were much bigger than I was. In the chaos of it all, corruption, despair, and hopeless I managed to capture and retain these precious and memorable time in Haiti.



In my third year in high school, I began to understand the benefit of being oblivious to the social and moral responsibility that one must hold. I was uncomfortable with a life of no prospect, no growth, no social mobility, no attachment, and no sense of self worth, being of service to no one but oneself. It was difficult to share those resentments and issues with my peers. Our future was a subject that we tried very hard to avoid for it would force us to face a situation that was painful to deal with and out of our control. School was more like our outlet to whisk away frustration. It was nothing but a way to occupy our time. When Eddie, our neighborhood friend, graduated from high school, four years earlier than me, he could not get accepted in any of the state run universities. With no money for private universities or overseas' education, we all knew that his future was doomed. He buried his sorrow in alcohol and became a drug addict, from which he never recovered from. At that point I seriously began to

question the purpose of my education. I thought I could spare myself all the heartache and quit school.

While taking my final exam, I received word that I will be traveling to New York City to join my parents whom I have not seen in years. I knew then it was a one way trip. Besides, who would pull a kid out of school during the final exam and have him restart the year.

As much as I can remember at the time, I had very few recollections of my parents. My adolescent years were gone without them. I was raised by my aunt who did a great job given the circumstances. She had a soft spot for me and I always felt loved and comforted. As many of her generation, she believed in luck and took her number games seriously. Every dream or nightmare had a number significance that can easily be translated into the winning lottery number. It is only now, watching my father in the winter of his life, played the numbers in a sort of rigid ritual that I understand her obsession with gambling. She did not play to win. It was the thrill of the game that was most exciting. It also made a mundane life bearable and full of hope.

Moving to New York was so refreshing. It was as if I was offered a new life and a new opportunity in so many respects. I got to be reunited with my parents.



When I first saw them in New York, they looked old to me but I thought they had a few good years left in them for me to enjoy: and that I did. My mother and I spent considerable time together and I realized how much alike we were. She was a very proud woman who commanded respect at all times. She used to say to me: “You have to respect all people all the time and you have to willing to die for yours”. Her devotion to respect and honor is as important to her as it would be to a Samurai fighter committing suicide to redeem honor to his family.

I was excited about learning once more. I was especially surprised to see how easy it was to get a job. I could not believe that I was getting paid to do things that I would have volunteered for: just so I could be of service. As quickly as I was enjoying my new found paradise, I began to long for Haiti. It is often said that a kid would always forgive his mother no matter what happened. I had forgiven Haiti. I even forgot the despair and the corruption that kept it at a third world status: a classification, I have grown to despise.

My thought began to drift to so many unfortunate souls left behind. I began to feel guilty and sad. I spent the first two years sitting every evening on a Riverside park bench looking at the Hudson River thinking of the lives that will be adrift, wasted, buried at the bottom of a bottle and faded away in the slowly wavering smoke of a marijuana-joint. By the time I graduated high school in 1985, I wanted so much to go back to Haiti. By then the revolution was in full swing. There were riots on the streets and people were demanding Duvalier’s resignation. When Duvalier finally left, the Haitian government completely collapsed. The remaining few agencies that were producing any kind of public service were gone. Haiti was given one more chance to renew itself. What was supposed to be a rebirth was followed by civil unrest, riots, lynching, kidnapping, and raping. This had been the norm during the post Duvalier era. Almost every Haitian in a country of eight million people knew someone who had been victimized. As if that was not enough Mother Nature unleashed a furry of natural disaster on Haiti. Following the devastating hurricanes that washed away more than half of the population of Gonaives and killed more than 20, 000 people in one night, we thought the worst was finally over. Haiti had nothing else to give and there was nothing else to take. We thought it could not get any worst. Despite all of that we had endured: Then January 12th, 2010, the destructive earthquake. The destruction was so severe that it was beyond anyone’s imagination. Those who lived through it thought it was the end of the world.

In the comfort of my home I watched in disbelief as thousands and thousands of Haitians died. Their numbers were in the hundreds of thousands. Those who survived were emotionally, psychologically and physically scarred beyond recognition. As details of the disaster began to emerge, video clips covered the CNN news cable, and words of friends who have passed away in tragic circumstances began to close the distance between me and Haiti. I was grabbed by the throat with a mixture of anger, pain, sorrow, frustration, fear, all converging, and bubbling in an incomprehensible avalanche of thoughts and feelings impossible to express in words or in tears. I sat motionless for a while wondering how cruel our punishment must be. What did we do in our past that was so grave to deserve such heavy handed reprimand?

They say Haitians are resourceful and we always find a way to survive and somehow we will find our way through this. I say that we are desensitized and after a while we don’t feel the pain anymore. We cope by forgetting. We build a natural sense of apathy.

Every now and then in the most unexpected time, I draw a smile, reminiscing about a moment in time when life was simple and perfect living in Haiti.

# History

Betty DeRamus

Detroit's black history is a blend of hallelujahs and hard times, troubles and triumphs. We've always known how to take what seemed like very little and turn it into more than enough.



In 1833, armed Detroit and Canadian blacks stormed the Detroit jail to rescue two runaway slaves about to be dragged back to Kentucky. The fugitives escaped to Canada, and their rescuers soon established a slavery-fighting church called Second Baptist. In the 19th century, Detroiters also founded the African American Mysteries: The Order of the Men of Oppression, a secret group that helped slaves flee to freedom. The Order's Grand Charter Lodge sat on Jefferson between Bates and Randolph. By the early 20th century, Detroit had a new mission. It became a major destination for Southern blacks lured to the North by the hope of better jobs and housing. Many wound up in the eastside Detroit neighborhood called Black Bottom because of its dark, rich soil. Originally settled by Italians, Greeks, Poles and Jews, Black Bottom became a black neighborhood once Southern migrants moved east of Woodward to Elmwood and from Gratiot and Vernor Highway south to Larned. By 1920, blacks in Detroit owned a movie theater, a pawnshop, a cooperative grocery store, a bank and scores of other businesses. The community also had 27 physicians, 22 lawyers, 22 barbershops, 13 dentists, 11 tailors, eight grocers, six drugstores and a candy maker.

In the 1930s, the area around St. Antoine and Adams became known as Paradise Valley, an entertainment district that swayed to the rhythms of

jazz and blues and joy. The Valley was mostly black by day. Yet whites and blacks danced and drank in its clubs and bars after dark, leaving a trail of loose change and laughter. The Valley included 17 black-owned nightclubs as well as private clubs, restaurants, stores and other institutions such as the Lucy Thurman YWCA.

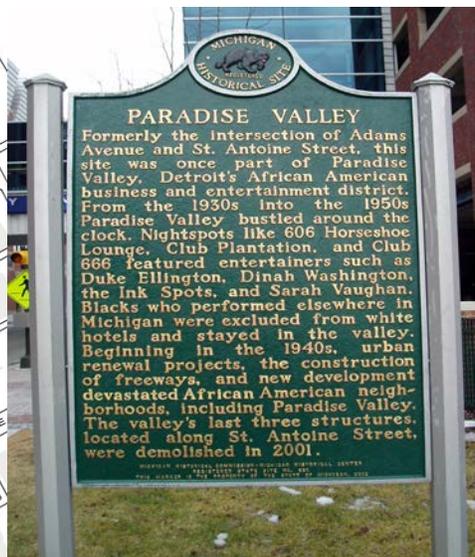
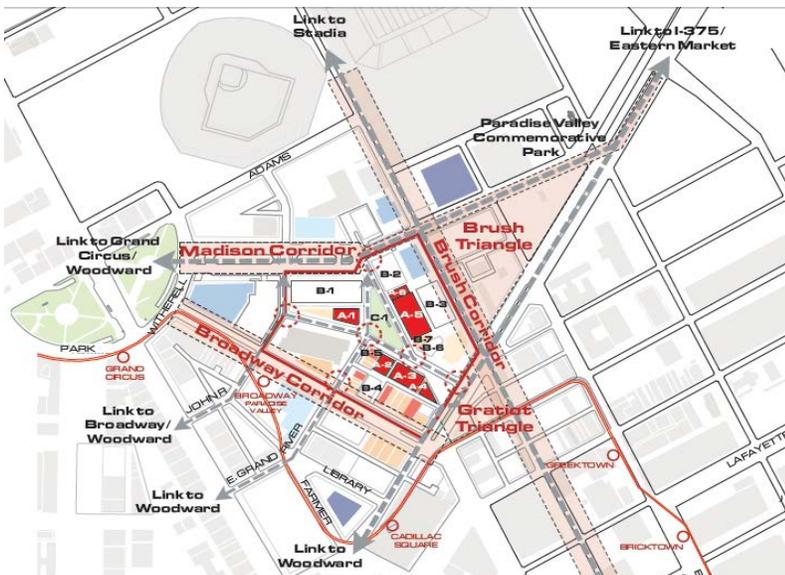
Today, Detroit is ailing, but it hasn't lost its purpose or sense of history. This is still the city that once had the nation's highest percentage of black homeowners. This is still the city that was the first in the country to hold riverfront ethnic festivals, use radio-dispatched police cars and develop an urban freeway. This is still the place where the congregation of one downtown church raised \$1,557 on a single Sunday in 1957 to support the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott. This remains the Detroit that staged an earlier, 125,000-person version of the famed 1963 March on Washington. And this is the city that always found ways to support black solidarity and self help.

In supporting Haiti, you continue all of these traditions. So keep on believing you have the power to make change. Keep understanding that your actions, prayers and dollars count. Keep representing the REAL spirit of Detroit. ♦

A veteran and award winning journalist, DeRamus was the jury's pick and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 1993. She has been awarded a Michigan Press Association Award, as well as the Deems Taylor award for a profile of Roberta Flack published in *Essence*.

DeRamus was one of an international group of select journalists who toured Central African refugee camps under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and one of a small group of journalists outside Voerster prison in 1990 when Nelson Mandela finally left his cell.

She has written about African-American history for *Essence*, *Time-Life*, *North Star Journal*, and *Black World*. She is a former commentator for *The Detroit News*, *The Detroit Free Press*, *The Michigan Chronicle*, and the British Broadcasting Company.



# Literary Corner



*Jonathan Desir*

Constantly hurl adversity  
An entire lifetime of struggle released on me  
Reigning down heavenly in disguise  
Disgust  
In god I  
Trust I will be richer than the average man  
when all is said and done  
My seeds soak from the sun and will grow like fresh fruit

Why do they hate me  
He who sings of my land  
Flag in hand stands tall on every stage  
On every page writes rhymes  
sings with somber rage  
So world may open cage  
Yet they question intention  
Refugee they fail to mention

Why do they hate me  
Crack me  
Break my back, shatter me  
Fail to give me light to lead my seeds to where they should be  
Instead they open me, pull them in  
On scale from one to richer life left quicker than sin  
Original stripped from kin  
Born  
no chance to win  
ragged in rubble

In times of no hope  
there are those who try to trick us  
kick us when down  
This island is ocean  
those who cannot swim drown  
What doesn't kill you makes you stronger  
we will persevere  
we are long overdue  
I will not question you  
we will survive

Haiti  
The antithesis of hate ♦

## Freedom House

*Alexa Stannard*

Freedom House was honored to participate in the Haitian Network Group of Detroit's (HNGD) L'Ajoupka fund-raising event in August 2010. It was the beginning of a fruitful friendship between our organizations.

Freedom House is a temporary shelter for victims of persecution from around the world. We were founded in 1983 and today are located in Southwest Detroit. We provide comprehensive services to asylum seekers, including shelter, clothing, food, legal aid, medical care, mental health care, English as a Second Language, and job training. The vast majority of our clients come from sub-Saharan Africa.

We have a long history of serving the Haitian community. Until July 2009, Haiti was one of eight countries granted special status by the Canadian government. Freedom House has helped hundreds of Haitians safely and legally cross the border to Canada to begin a new life.

Unfortunately, with the recent change in Canada's law, the number of Haitians able to enter the country legally has plummeted. Freedom House now counts far fewer Haitians among our clients.

It is our hope that our new relationship with HNGD will renew our relationship with the Haitian community. We enjoyed having Rosario Danier serve on the Honorary Committee for our annual dinner on Nov. 11, 2010 at the Max M. Fisher Music Center in Detroit. We would be honored to have members of HNGD join forces with us during future events. ♦

## MABO

*Naomi Levitz*

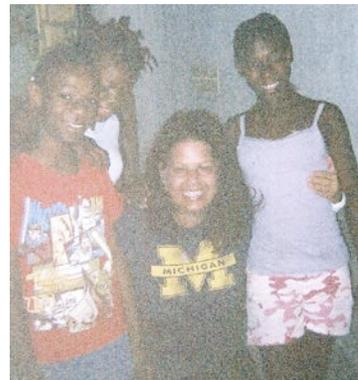
After many years of hoping to establish a home to help some of the Haitian children they encountered every day, the Orel family secured a generous donation from Advent in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 2008, MABO (Mouvement a Bien Etre des Opprimes) secured their first home for children in Petionville, Haiti, and before long the house was filled with laughter, learning and camaraderie. One of the Haitian Network Group of Detroit's (HNDG) own members, Naomi Levitz is an active part of the MABO family. The children are able to have teachers on site and caring staff at all times. While none of MABO was harmed during the earthquake in Jan 2010, the children have been reluctant to return to life as usual.

Recently, MABO was able to relocate and expand their family to 25. Each of the children is working diligently to contribute to their home and see MABO as an extension of their biological family. As they grown and thrive in a safe environment with constant love, the children can begin to look towards a future they once lacked. When asked what they wanted to do with their lives, each spoke about wanting

to stay and help Haiti grow. Please join in this important cause. The best way to help secure Haiti's future is through children like these.

[www.mabohaiti.org](http://www.mabohaiti.org)

♦



## **210 Years Anniversary of Toussaint's death**



On April , 2013, Haiti commemorated the 210<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Toussaint Louverture, the father of the Haitian revolution.

Recently, Louverture has been the subject of many films, one of which is a PBS documentary that will be featured this year by the Haitian Network Group of Detroit.

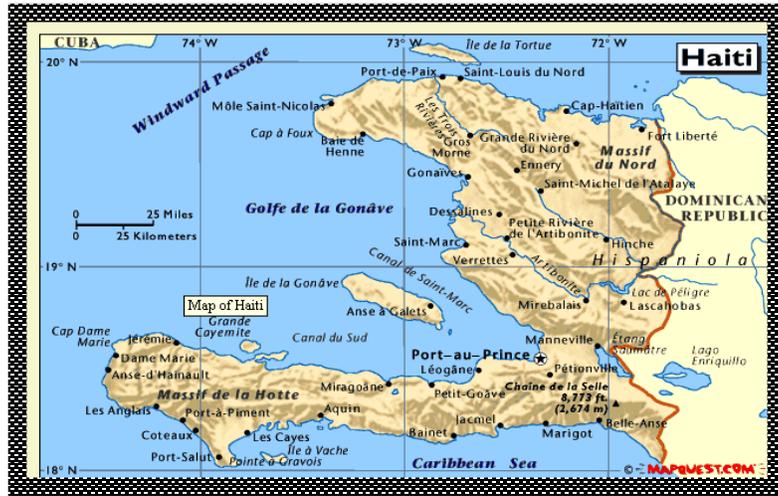
Toussaint died in Prison in Fort-de-Joux on April 7, 1803, almost one year prior to the proclamation of Haiti's independence. As if in ... Toussaint told his captors : "In overthrowing me, you have cut down in Saint-Domingue only the trunk of the tree of liberty. It will spring up again by the roots for they are numerous and deep.

In 1983, the remains of Toussaint were placed at the MUPANAH site, Musee du Pantheon National.

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**Rosario Danier  
Betty DeRamus  
Jonathan Desir  
Naomi Levitz  
Alexa Stanard**



**Zanmi Detroit** is published by the Haitian Network Group of Detroit, whose mission is to promote Haitian culture and provide a forum for Haitians and friends to network.

Please e-mail questions or comments to the HNGD: [hngdcom@hngd.com](mailto:hngdcom@hngd.com)

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